



# Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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## TEMPORARY RULE IMPLEMENTED TO REDUCE RECREATIONAL RED GROUPER HARVEST IN THE GULF OF MEXICO FOR THE 2005 FISHING YEAR

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has published a temporary rule in the *Federal Register* implementing management measures for the recreational grouper fishery in the exclusive economic zone of the Gulf of Mexico, as requested by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, to reduce overfishing of red grouper. This rule establishes a seasonal closure of the recreational fishery for all Gulf grouper species and reduces both the recreational bag limit for red grouper and the aggregate grouper bag limit. The intended effects are to reduce overfishing of red grouper in the Gulf of Mexico and to minimize potential adverse impacts on other grouper stocks that could result from a shift in fishing effort from red grouper to other grouper species. This rule is effective August 9, 2005.

### **Reduction of the Red Grouper Bag Limit, Combined with a Seasonal Closure of the Recreational Grouper Fishery**

This temporary rule reduces the red grouper bag limit from 2 fish per person per day to 1 fish per person per day and establishes a closure of the recreational fishery, from November 1 through December 31, 2005, for all grouper species. Because red grouper are part of a multispecies fishery, prohibiting harvest of all groupers during the seasonal closure will reduce bycatch of red grouper and subsequent discard mortality. Applying the closure to all groupers will also protect other grouper species from a potential shift of fishing effort from red grouper to other groupers.

### **Reduction of the Aggregate Grouper Bag Limit**

This temporary rule reduces the aggregate bag limit to 3 grouper, combined, per person per day,

excluding Goliath grouper and Nassau grouper, but not to exceed 1 speckled hind or 1 warsaw grouper per vessel per day or 1 red grouper per person per day. The aggregate grouper bag limit applies to all groupers, except Goliath grouper (formerly jewfish) and Nassau grouper (for which no harvest is allowed), and within the aggregate bag limit, further limitations apply to possession of red grouper, speckled hind, and warsaw grouper. Note that this also incorporates the red grouper bag limit reduction discussed previously. The reduction in the aggregate bag limit will provide protection of other grouper species from redirected red grouper fishing effort and may reduce bycatch mortality of red grouper, assuming anglers cease fishing when the aggregate limit is reached.

The commercial fishery is managed through quotas, closed seasons, size limits, gear restrictions, trip limits, and closed seasons.

### **Contact Information, Dates, and Addresses**

Requests for copies of documents supporting this rule may be obtained from the Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 263 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701.

Written comments of the temporary rule must be received no later than 5:00 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, on August 24, 2005. Comments may be submitted via e-mail, written correspondence, or fax.

**E-mail:** [0648-AT45.Interim@noaa.gov](mailto:0648-AT45.Interim@noaa.gov). Include in the subject line the following document identifier: 0648-AT45.

**Federal e-Rulemaking Portal:** Follow the instructions at <http://www.regulations.gov>.

**Mail:** Phil Steele, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 263 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701.

**Fax:** 727-824-5308: Attention: Phil Steele.

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them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to customers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

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NMFS is an agency of the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

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